The United Nations University in Brief

Answers to questions often asked about the United Nations University and some facts and figures about current operations

Inquiries: Information services
United Nations University
Toho Seimei Bldg., 2-15-1 Shibuya
Shibuya-ku, Tokyo 150, Japan
Tel. (03) 499-2811, Fax (03) 499-2828
Telex J25442 UNATUNIV
Cable UNATUNIV TOKYO

WHY TOKYO?

The location of the UNU programming and co-ordinating centre in Tokyo demonstrates a long-standing Japanese commitment to the goals of the United Nations – and the willingness of the Japanese Government to underwrite that interest in a decisive and imaginative manner. While the University was still in its initial conceptual stages, in the early 1970s, the Government of Japan pledged US$100 million to the University's endowment fund and offered to provide headquarters and other facilities. Although the main headquarters will be in the Japanese capital, the bulk of the UNU's work will continue to be carried out through its far-flung research, training and dissemination networks around the world.

A permanent headquarters building, a distinctive 14-story design by the noted architect Kenzo Tange, is now under construction in the Shibuya area of Tokyo.

THE GOVERNING COUNCIL

The University Council, which sets principles and policies, has twenty-four members who are appointed jointly by the Secretary-General of the UN and the Director-General of UNESCO for six-year terms. They serve in their individual capacities, not as spokesmen for their countries. Council members come from Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and North and South America. Their academic backgrounds are diverse, ranging across the physical and social sciences, and most have taught at universities in their own countries. Many have served in government posts and have also been head of an institution of higher learning. The present Chairman of the Council is Professor Mihály Simai, a Hungarian economist who is Director of the Institute for World Economics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He is also Professor and Director of Graduate Studies of the Karl Marx University of Economic Sciences. There are three ex officio members: the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Director-General of UNESCO, and the Executive Director of UNITAR. The Rector is also a member of the Council.

THE RECTOR

Professor Heitor Gurgulino de Souza, a Brazilian educator and scientist, is the third Rector of the University. Appointed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, after consultation with and the concurrence of the Director-General of UNESCO, he took office on 1 September 1987. He succeeds Dr. James M. Hester of the United States (1975–80) and the late Mr. Soedjatmoko of Indonesia (1980–87). When appointed, Professor Gurgulino was President of the Latin American University Group, head of the Planning Committee of the Federal Council of Education of Brazil, and a member of the UNU Council. He was the Founding Rector of the Federal University of São Carlos in São Paulo State. A physicist, he has been Professor of Science at the "Julio de Mesquita Filho" State University of São Paulo for three decades; he is the author of a number of publications in the fields of physics and scientific and technological applications to development.

MONEY MATTERS

The University's budget for the 1990–91 biennium is $48 million. An increasing portion of the University's overall budget is spent at its research and training centres and programmes in different parts of the world. Financial support comes entirely from voluntary contributions from governments, bilateral and multilateral agencies, foundations and other public and private sources. The University receives no funds from the regular budget of the United Nations. Major contributions are to its endowment fund, a capital fund invested to yield the basic annual income; the UNU also receives annual-type operating contributions as well as specific programme and project support. As of 1 January 1990, pledges to the endowment and operating funds from 47 countries totalled $210.5 million, of which $189.3 million had been received.

'AT THE SITE OF EACH CENTRE'...

The opening words of the Charter define the University as "an international community of scholars." Through its world-wide research, training and dissemination activities, the UNU has "its location at the site of each centre or programme." In addition to the networks of existing institutions – universities, research organizations and the like – participating in the work, the UNU also establishes its own research and training centres to deal with long-term problems that are not sufficiently being addressed elsewhere.

The first such centre is the UNU World Institute for Development Economics Research (WIDER) in Helsinki, Finland. Its principal purpose is to help identify and meet the need for policy-oriented socio-economic research on pressing global and development problems.

Another centre which is expected to begin work soon is the UNU Institute for Natural Resources in Africa (INRA), which will be located in Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire, with a mineral resources unit in Lusaka, Zambia. It is designed to mobilize the African scientific community in evolving better use of the continent's rich natural resource base. A third centre, the UNU Institute for New Technologies (INTECH), in Maastricht, The Netherlands, will soon start work on various aspects of new technologies and their economic and social implications, particularly in relation to developing countries. A fourth centre to be located in Macau, is the UNU Institute for Software Technology (UNUIST) which will undertake research, advanced training and dissemination of knowledge on the development and adaptation of advanced computer software to meet the needs and strengthen the capabilities of developing countries. An Institute of Advanced Studies will be established as part of the University headquarters complex in Tokyo. A programme on biotechnology in Latin America and the Caribbean, with a programme office in Caracas, Venezuela, has also been launched.

Other UNU centres and programmes, now at different planning stages, will be in the areas of governance, environment and health, and outer space and society.

UNU IN THE 1990s

The University's Second Medium-Term Perspective (MTP II) defines the essential thrust of the UNU work in the 1990s. The work is motivated by the heightened awareness that human activities are now capable of altering our world in unprecedented and often frightening fashion. Human striving for social and material progress is bringing about marked changes in the systems that support life on Earth.

MTP II defines five major clusters of interrelated problems and trends:

- **Universal human values and global responsibilities** – consideration of the clashing human values in our time that can cause conflict and tension and impede the ability of societies to equitably manage and govern the affairs of their members.
- **New directions for the world economy** – fragmentation and disarray pose new sets of concerns about the world economy, including the recognition that the planet's biological and geophysical systems are important components of modern economic impulses.
- **Sustaining global life-support systems** – environmental problems have gone from largely localized disruptions to long-term, potentially catastrophic repercussions that could threaten all life on Earth.
- **Advances in science and technology** – the consequences of technological changes at the frontiers of knowledge – robotics, informatics, new materials technology – that are reweaving the fabric of the global society.
- **Population dynamics and human welfare** – coping with demographic forces that are creating huge and unmanageable cities, with particular emphasis on nutrition and health problems.

A number of specific programmes within these five major clusters have been developed for implementation during the six-year MTP II, beginning in 1990.

WHAT – NO STUDENTS? Perhaps the question asked most often about the UNU is: Where are the students? In fact, there are none in the usual sense – and it was planned that way by international experts who sought to develop a fresh concept of a university: one where science and scholarship could co-operate across national and cultural boundaries on many complex problems that are by nature international. The UN created this new university to reach out to all parts of the world and form cross-cultural, cross-disciplinary partnerships with the international scholarly community. The UNU "faculty" is made up of the scholars and experts involved in such partnerships. The "students" are mainly young professionals from developing countries, who receive post-graduate training as UNU Fellows.

NO APPLICATIONS, PLEASE Strictly speaking, a potential student cannot apply directly for UNU post-graduate training. UNU Fellows are chosen by personal interviews after recommendations from their home institutions, which must be working in an area of priority concern to the UNU. Individual applicants are interviewed only if their institutions are eligible and request an interview. Candidates must be committed to returning to work at their home institutions, which must guarantee them an opportunity to use their UNU training on their return. Most fellows are from developing countries. Candidates from industrialized countries may become UNU Fellows, but only provided they have an outside source of supporting funds and their interest and experience can be matched with a UNU programme priority area.

BREACHING WALLS OF IGNORANCE It is often assumed that once information is available it naturally flows to useful outlets; in fact much of the world's knowledge lies unused behind walls of ignorance, indifference and inefficiency. The UNU seeks to breach these walls and channel knowledge where it is most needed. Its academic and scientific publications cover the fields of peace and regional studies, political economy and development, society and culture, international law, food and nutrition, energy technology, and the use and management of natural resources. These include journals on food and nutrition, food data analysis, mountain ecology and sustainable development, and solar energy. UNU publications are being widely used for technical and university level training and research, and for policy formation and implementation, particularly in developing countries. In addition, computerized data bases on distance learning systems, ethnic minorities, migrant workers, support for the aged, and conflict resolution are assisting researchers to focus on some of the critical social aspects of development. Videotapes are also used to help communicate, for example, technical aspects of land use in tropical countries and the use of biogas systems to increase self-sufficiency in energy. The University's main public information vehicle, *Work in Progress* keeps scholars and scientists in touch with its work, and is also employed as supplementary reading material in schools.

SUSTAINING THE EARTH Of all the obstacles which may encumber the world's passage into the 21st century, the biggest may be our own actions in despoiling the Earth. Disruptions in the globe's life-support systems have helped trigger massive political, social and cultural upheavals: the biggest single category of refugees, for example, is now people fleeing large-scale environmental degradation. In collaboration with the International Federation of Institutes for Advanced Study, the International Social Science Council and UNESCO, the UNU is trying to improve knowledge of the complex, interwoven human dimensions that affect global environmental change, in a long-term research programme expected to last through the end of this century. This human sciences programme complements the work of natural scientists that is already underway in the International Geosphere/Biosphere Programme of the International Council of Scientific Unions.

WHY WAS UNU CREATED?

The late Mr. U Thant, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, proposed a United Nations University in 1969. After world-wide consultation, a UN-appointed committee recommended that a new kind of university was needed, designed to:

- promote international scholarly and scientific co-operation in helping to solve urgent global concerns;
- undertake problem-oriented, multidisciplinary research on such concerns through world-wide networks of individuals and institutions;
- strengthen research and training capabilities in developing countries.

WHAT PROBLEMS IS IT DEALING WITH?

The University works on the pressing global problems of human survival, development and welfare that are the concern of the United Nations and its agencies. Its multidisciplinary studies involve the social sciences and the humanities as well as natural sciences, pure and applied.

HOW DOES IT ORGANIZE ITS WORK?

The University is organized on the network principle, with the following component parts: 1) The University Centre in Tokyo – main programming and co-ordinating body; 2) Research and training facilities – created by the UNU itself in various parts of the world to focus on specific long-term problems not sufficiently addressed elsewhere; 3) Linkages with existing universities, national research centres, etc., located mainly in developing countries – to help carry out research and training and denote the UNU's global mandate. These interacting elements form a flexible and organic University whole.

January 1990 E22-1-90